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WHO MANS THE WALLS?  
EUROPEAN SECURITY REQUIREMENTS FOR U.S. MILITARY  
PRESENCE IN THE 1970'S

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WHO MANS THE WALLS?  
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FOR  
US MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE 1970'S

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EUROPEAN SECURITY REQUIREMENTS FOR US  
MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE 1970'S

INTRODUCTION

"Greece's foreign minister said today that his country is no longer a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization because the Alliance no longer exists."

Long Island Press  
August 14, 1974, p. 1.

The fact that such a statement could be made and remain essentially unchallenged is surely reason enough to question the meaning and value of continued United States commitment to this troubled Alliance. The Greek action over Cyprus is only the most recent and visible of the unravelling of the strong ties which once bound the Atlantic Alliance together. This paper summarizes NATO's origins, rise and, apparent decline as they bear on the requirements for continued United States military presence.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

That NATO's origin contemplated more than military security alone is indicated clearly in Article 3 of the Treaty's charter which states, "... (members) will seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies and encourage economic collaboration between any or all of them."<sup>1</sup> Even this more ambitious goal was challenged by many who foresaw the disruptive effects of economic and

domestic political factionalism on the Alliance's military character.<sup>2</sup> Despite questions regarding the organization's broader aims, it is apparent that the primary motivation for the Alliance was the then-perceived Soviet military threat. The presence of this threat and its galvanizing effect on the Alliance was underscored by Russia's extermination of Czechoslovakian freedom and imposition of the Berlin blockade in 1948. United States commitment was solidly placed behind the Alliance at this time<sup>3</sup> and, to varying degrees, has remained a cornerstone of our new policies in Europe since that time. This broader military concern was reinforced by Soviet intentions inferred from their handling of the Hungarian and Czechoslovak crises.<sup>4</sup>

From its inception, the Alliance based its strategic planning on a number of premises which remain valid essentially today: United States strategic nuclear forces functioning remotely anchor the defense of Western Europe; the primary ground threat remains on the central German frontier; and that United States troop presence will further guarantee United States commitment.<sup>5</sup> It was further presumed that Soviet thinking called for massive offensive operations designed to overwhelm Western defenses with follow-up Warsaw Pact formations neutralizing remaining NATO pockets of resistance. The entire campaign would be over, the Russians

said, in three weeks.<sup>6</sup> NATO's early successes and cooperative efforts can be attributed to the immediacy and credibility of the Soviet military threat.<sup>7</sup> During this phase, Alliance strategy assumed that any weakness would be immediately seized upon by the Soviets with the resulting extension of Soviet hegemony from the Elbe to the Channel or beyond. This environment provided the basis for the concept of containment which, as developed by George F. Kennan,<sup>8</sup> guided Western policy for over a decade.

One of the earliest indications (and most obvious) of NATO's serious internal problems was the French withdrawal. Despite the Alliance's ability to compensate significantly for this clear shift in the balance, the French defection stimulated a series of introspective analyses regarding the Alliance's prospects and, indeed, even its continued existence. These assessments included Chalmer's optimistic appraisal of the ultimate success of containment<sup>9</sup> and Jeschonnek's re-definition of NATO's increased naval role.<sup>10</sup> More prophetic questions were raised by Brzezinski<sup>11</sup> and Canby<sup>12</sup> who perceived the broader threat to NATO as political and economic. This broader view of Europe's strategic climate, problems and opportunities was further defined by Air Vice Marshall Menaul when he pinpointed the crucial factor as the changing relationship between America and Europe--both East and West.<sup>13</sup>



### TODAY'S STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Any consideration of NATO's future must consider the realism and relevancy of its objectives to perceive threats of the security of the Atlantic community. If these objectives are still valid, then the essential questions are the adequacy of resources to meet future contingencies and the commitment to use them. NATO's former Supreme Commander, General Andrew Goodpaster, has stated the Alliance's primary objectives as deterrence and defense with implicit objectives for the promotion of solidarity and détente.<sup>14</sup> There seems little doubt that these objectives constitute valid and relevant goals for the future. Their realism, however, even given adequate resources and commitment is less obvious and more controversial.

This facet will be examined in greater detail later.

NATO enters its 25th year facing the most complex and serious threats since its founding in 1949. The strategic threat environment contains major internal as well as exterior elements; political and economic components and, of course, the continued military threat posed by the Warsaw Pact. The internal threat, although less obvious, may prove the more serious. Ironically, a major source of this internal threat results from the relaxation of tensions stemming from successful efforts to substitute negotiation for confrontation.<sup>15</sup> Crushing domestic problems of economic stability, inflation,

energy and raw materials scarcity and political disintegration have relegated military security to a secondary consideration. Prospects for United States-Soviet strategic arms limitation (SALT) agreement and mutual, balanced force reductions (MBFR) have contributed significantly to this reordering of national priorities. Although varying in degree, each of these problems bears on each member of the Alliance and each transcends isolated national resolution. These problems are compounded by their interdependencies and demands for unified action which have yet to be fully recognized.

International monetary stability is jeopardized by the pressures generated by unified action of the world's oil-producing nations. Any efforts by the West, or even socialist states, to alleviate the prospects of gross economic imbalances will require the cooperation of the oil-producing states until technology can offer viable alternatives. Despite recognition of this fact of life,<sup>16</sup> the oil producers' disunity renders resolution of this problem in the near future unlikely. Although domestic inflation among NATO's members is tied to international economic stability, each member has sought its own solution. These solutions, while varying in application and philosophy, have commonly involved reduced governmental spending. Inevitably this has focused attention on national security expenditures which constitute a major element of any

national budget. Even defense expenditures of NATO's individual members have become increasingly interrelated and devisive. Recent events illustrating these controversies include United States threats to reduce its present 300,000 man troop presence if an American fighter is not selected as the F104 replacement<sup>17</sup> and NATO's Defense Planning Committee strictures to the Dutch over their proposed manpower cuts.<sup>18,19</sup> Concerns over energy and raw materials have proved equally devisive factors as each Alliance member seeks to assure his own sources. Two examples of the seriousness of the energy crises to NATO solidarity are France's December 1973 desertion of her EEC partners in presenting a uniform response to the Arab oil embargo. The second example is the United States role in the Middle East. Europeans regard United States interests in that area of the world as fundamentally different from their own. They view the United States as largely self-sufficient in oil with Middle Eastern imports as less than five percent of national consumption versus Europe's dependency on this area for 80% of its oil consumption needs.<sup>20</sup> In this context, ties with the United States are viewed as a temporary risk for Europe due to American involvements in the Arab-Israeli antagonism. This same concept regards the United States ties with Europe as presenting a continuing impediment to United States options in the Middle East precisely because

of Europe's dependency on oil from that area.<sup>21</sup> These international, regional and domestic problems have brought down the governments of a number of NATO members and left still others on tenderhooks.<sup>22</sup> None of these domestic threats lend themselves to near-term solutions nor do they promote regional unity toward their solution. Each tends to focus attention on immediate national interests and weakens the socio-economic bonds reinforcing the collective security interests uniting NATO.

NATO's external threat is largely military and consists primarily of the substantial Warsaw Pact forces deployed on its immediate frontiers and those readily available to reinforce any military action on the continent. Despite some controversy regarding exact Warsaw Pact capabilities, one fact remains largely undisputed--they have improved their military strength relative to that of the West.<sup>23,24</sup> Any appraisal of relative military strength must also consider the influence of geographic position on the ability of each side to reinforce its front line forces. Manpower comparisons in this light are particularly disturbing. Recent estimates place Warsaw Pact manpower numerical superiority at initiation of hostilities as approximately 25% greater than NATO's opposing forces.<sup>25,26,27</sup> These same estimates give the Warsaw Pact an added 25% advantage after 90 days,

even assuming theater deployment of United States Reserve forces. Among the other components of the military threat that must be countered are the Warsaw Pact's material, command and control and logistics strengths. The Warsaw Pact enjoys a numerical superiority over NATO of nearly three-to-one in operational main battle tanks.<sup>28</sup> The significance of this numerical superiority is increased by virtue of the standardization resulting from the fact that over 50% of these tanks are of Russian manufacture.<sup>29</sup> Warsaw Pact command and control as well as logistics benefit from their interior lines of communication. Despite declining defense expenditures and military forces since 1969<sup>30</sup> by NATO's European members, the Warsaw Pact has greatly increased its numerical strength and armaments in Central Europe over this same period.<sup>31,32</sup> This continental threat has been accompanied by substantial Soviet deployments and strengthened footholds on the Alliance's flanks, particularly in the Mediterranean. Beyond these substantial forces in-being, NATO's Defense Planning Committee has recently expressed its concern over the Warsaw Pact's continuing expansion and modernization programs.<sup>33</sup> A contributing factor to this expanded capability has been the continued presence of major Soviet forces and their reinforcing effect on local party control. Catherine Keller has tied Soviet troop presence to the need to contain national

liberalization movements, provide for forward defense of the USSR and to prevent the spread of Western liberalism into Eastern Europe.<sup>34</sup> None of these elements of the strategic threat to the security of the Atlantic community appear likely to diminish significantly in the foreseeable future, barring major and unexpected breakthroughs in United States-Soviet agreement on mutual and balanced force reductions.

This brief summary of the overall threat to NATO has deliberately neglected such dominating considerations as United States-Soviet strategic nuclear parity and other factors affecting the global strategic balance in order to focus attention on those elements immediately affecting NATO. It is recognized that major changes in this strategic balance may profoundly affect NATO's environment strategies, force structure and readiness posture.

NATO's ability to cope with its complex and grave threats requires a careful inventory of its resources--economic, political and military, as well as a subjective assessment of their willingness to use them should the need arise. Despite serious disruption of the international monetary system and severe inflationary problems, NATO's member nations are demonstrating the discipline required to bring these problems under control. Each member country possesses industrial, agricultural and manpower resources adequate to cope with its longer-term-

economic problems.<sup>35</sup> It is clear however, that solutions will be neither simple, easy, nor soon. Present indications are that solutions are being sought along national lines despite recognition of the need for cooperative action.<sup>36,37</sup>

While political stability is significantly tied to a nation's economic health, NATO's individual members have recognized the need for political unity in providing for collective security.<sup>38,39</sup> Despite this recognition, economic pressures have created serious domestic political instability in every NATO member country. In most instances, each country's democratic institutions have proved equal to the challenge and accommodated major adjustments without drastically revising its form of government. Greece is a notable exception and Italy's political system is under severe strain to cope with its economic problems. The recent division of Greece and Turkey over Cyprus illustrates that domestic problems may transcend concerns and commitments toward collective security. On balance, it appears reasonable to assume that, despite occasionally violent eruptions, Western Europe's democratic institutions will continue to provide an acceptable level of stability to assure NATO's continued existence and viability.

Appraisal of NATO's military strength relative to that of the Warsaw Pact requires consideration of tactical nuclear

capabilities, available military power, material and logistics. NATO possesses an inventory of at least 7,000 tactical nuclear weapons<sup>40</sup> which constitute a critical factor in balancing the manpower superiority of the Warsaw Pact. Delivery systems include missiles, rockets, bombs, artillery and demolition munitions. While these systems may well represent the decisive factor in a given tactical situation, their presence poses complex problems involving control,<sup>41</sup> storage and employment.<sup>42</sup> Evidence suggests that tactical nuclear weapons are now viewed as reinforcing conventional fire support rather than as an element of strategic deterrence.<sup>43</sup>

Recent estimates place NATO's ground strength at 28-2/3 divisions consisting of 802,000 men, including the two French divisions stationed in The Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>44</sup> Related factors in assessing NATO's strength include strategic concepts, operational doctrine, standards of training and morale.<sup>45</sup> NATO's basic strategic outlook is defensive and its extensive exercises are similarly oriented. United States Secretary of Defense Schlesinger has advanced a NATO deterrent concept based on strategic forces primarily in the United States, available tactical nuclear weapons to counter major Soviet aggression and a strong conventional capability in-being.<sup>47</sup> This concept underscores the basically defensive strategic basis and thinking of the Alliance's membership.



The AD 70 study previously cited noted that, despite its heavy armor density, NATO forces lack the prerequisites for major offensive operations.<sup>46</sup> Regular exercises, such as 1973's ABSALON EXPRESS in Denmark, are designed to improve the readiness, command coordination and morale of NATO's ground, naval and air force. Despite its lack of standardization, NATO's equipment provides a number of redressing advantages when compared with specific Warsaw Pact strengths:

- Anti-tank Weapons--new, superior weapons entering the inventory have reduced the tank's relative invulnerability.
- Artillery Ammunition--NATO's more lethal conventional ammunition is regarded as minimizing the impact of the Warsaw Pact's numerical superiority in conventional artillery pieces.
- Tactical Aircraft--NATO's more varied inventory of tactical aircraft includes more mission--specialized aircraft when compared with the more basically configured Soviet aircraft.
- Logistic Support--despite its geographic and political problems, NATO's logistics systems is considered capable of sustaining greater rates of fire than that of the Warsaw Pact.<sup>48</sup>

Comparisons between the threat and NATO's present ability to meet future contingencies suggest that the opposing forces are approximately equal. Three broad negative factors, or "asymmetries," work against NATO in such comparisons. General Goodpaster has identified these as: (1) inferiority in manpower and offensive-type weapons; (2) geographic position providing the Warsaw Pact with interior lines of communication;

and (3) the inherent disadvantage of NATO's defensive orientation compared with the increased flexibility conferred on the Warsaw Pact by its offensive strategic planning.<sup>49</sup>

#### IMPLICATIONS OF STRATEGIC BALANCE

In their recent report, U.S. TROOPS IN EUROPE, The Brookings Institute has outlined three broad purposes served by a politically stable military balance in Europe. These include:

- Deterrence--Military balance denies the Warsaw Pact the advantage required to justify an all-out attack.
- Flexibility--Strategic balance provides NATO with the ability to deal with a broader range of contingencies.
- Confidence--The balance provides the confidence for Europe to strengthen its own economic and political institutions while seeking further relaxation of tensions and mutual force reductions.<sup>50</sup>

It has been argued that, since the Soviet Union has never limited its attempts to extend its hegemony by purely military means, concepts of deterrence based on parity or balance are insufficient to cope with the Soviet threat.<sup>51</sup> The more widely held view suggests that Soviet willingness to negotiate force reductions in Europe is based on acceptance of two considerations; namely, that Europe is no longer necessary as a hostage against United States strategic weapons and that the prospects for dominating Western Europe appear remote.<sup>52</sup> Tyrus W. Cobb has noted that détente presupposes

not only a strategic balance, but also that strong, diverse and modern military power are likewise prerequisites.<sup>53</sup> There is evidence that the Soviets share this view that negotiation from strength is the best approach to capitalizing on opportunities presented by peaceful coexistence.<sup>54</sup>

#### THE U.S. ROLE

While the desirability of balanced NATO-Warsaw Pact forces is almost universally recognized, the relative burden assumed by each nation toward this end is highly controversial. Present arguments calling for reallocation of NATO's defense burden stem from the Nixon Doctrine which, in 1971, set forth the principals of partnership, strength and willingness to negotiate.<sup>55</sup> The United States is presently seeking a more equitable adjustment of the European defense burden in absolute costs. Defense Secretary Schlesinger has acknowledged that our allies presently contribute approximately 90% of NATO's ground forces, 80% of the ships and 75% of the aircraft.<sup>56</sup> General Goodpaster has isolated the burden-sharing question into two broad issues: foreign exchange costs and budgetary costs.<sup>57</sup> Rather than belabor these complex questions, it is sufficient to note that they highlight the relatively higher percentage of Gross National Product (GNP) applied to defense by the United States than by our European allies. It is important to recognize that America's contribution to NATO

is considerably greater than military strength alone would suggest. United States military presence serves three broad objectives: maintaining the strategic balance, evidencing clear United States commitment and providing the glue to bind the European Alliance.

Despite the high priority assigned to a more balanced sharing of the defense burden, the political and economic pressures bearing on our allies make the chances for major readjustment remote. In essence, we must consider two basic alternatives: maintain our present force levels with, perhaps, some token reductions or unilaterally reduce our forces and let the chips fall where they may. If the problem were limited to military considerations alone, the ramifications of either of these courses of action would be difficult to assess. This paper has underscored the overriding importance of economic and political factors in sustaining the Alliance and preserving its military capability. Viewed in this context, European security requirements for United States military presence in the 1970's are much more significant than merely maintaining a specific troop basis or force structure. The following analysis of our principal alternatives is based on preservation of United States-Soviet strategic nuclear parity and that the success of any future SALT or MBFR discussions must rest on theater-balanced forces in Europe.

Before discussing the consequences of various levels of European military force levels and commitments it is important to summarize the purposes served by United States military presence on the continent. This presence has provided these prime factors which have contributed significantly to the Alliance's survival in the face of economic and political, as well as military threats. These factors consist of commitment, involvement and stability.

The physical presence of United States forces provides highly visible evidence of United States commitment to collective security of the Atlantic Community. This constant presence is far more significant than occasional "showing of the flag" in terms of preserving credibility.

The forward deployment of United States forces virtually assures American involvement in any overt Warsaw Pact aggression. This factor has been cited by some Europeans as lessening rather than strengthening the effectiveness of United States strategic deterrence by suggesting that Soviet aggression may be met by less than strategic nuclear confrontation.<sup>58</sup> This argument rests on the premise that Western Europe is indefensible by conventional forces alone and would necessarily call for the use of tactical nuclear weapons with the probability of escalation leading to the destruction of Western Europe. The United States maintains that the most

realistic defense for Europe is one capable of curbing any level of Soviet aggression by means short of mutual destruction.<sup>59</sup>

United States presence and active participation provides a stabilizing influence on the Alliance by damping-off some of the political and economic shock waves that periodically rock Europe and the rest of the world. This stability has freed national resources which have permitted NATO to pursue its broader goals in scientific,<sup>60</sup> economic<sup>61</sup> and environmental<sup>62</sup> cooperation. These ambitious long-term efforts would not be possible if the military threat demanded the full available scientific and industrial means of each member state.

#### THE HARD CHOICES

As each member of NATO faces its own precarious economic and political future, its commitment to the Alliance must come under the most thorough review. The United States is no exception and it has become increasingly common to hear calls for mutual or even unilateral reduction of the forces opposing Soviet presence in Europe. Since there are few advocates of increasing actual troop strength in Europe (as opposed to modernizing existing forces) it is really necessary to consider seriously only two most likely alternatives: maintain present force levels or reduce the forces of the Alliance either collectively or by individual members.

Before analyzing national implications of these alternatives, their broader impact warrants consideration. Maintenance of the status quo, under the umbrella of United States-Soviet strategic balance, seems likely to preserve the relative stability which has existed in recent years. Such stability, based on the existence of comparative military power, provides a reasonable basis for continuation of mutual and balanced force reduction negotiations while assuring an adequate deterrent should the negotiations prove unsuccessful or unduly protracted. This alternative however, offers no relief to NATO's members in terms of their individual defense burdens barring a major reallocation of defense missions or responsibilities. This alternative, however desirable, appears overly optimistic in view of the severe economic and political stresses likely to fall on the Alliance's individual members over the near future and their uneven ability to meet these challenges.

Collective or individual unilateral troop reduction without compensating increases elsewhere in NATO poses more serious consequences. This destabilizing action would remove a major incentive to mutuality and balance in force reductions; reduce NATO's deterrent credibility; weaken the West's negotiating strength in discussions involving Berlin and other local disputes; and, perhaps, fatally rupture the

strained links binding the Alliance together. The most serious consequences of this alternative relate to the source of the troop reduction. Should the United States arbitrarily reduce its military presence, there is evidence that West Germany might seek to redress the balance, but that NATO's other members would be less inclined to assume increased burdens.<sup>63</sup> This view, based on Europe's position in America's forward defensive strategy neglects the impact of possible reaction to any substantial increase in Germany's military strength.

It is precisely this reaction which poses the most serious threat to NATO unity. General Hans Mueller, a former Obercomando Wehrmacht senior commander, has indicated that he believes Germany would be compelled to increase its military strength to compensate for any reduction in United States troop strength on the continent.<sup>64</sup> Correspondingly, other members of the Alliance may feel compelled to strengthen their forces--more to offset perceived German militarism than as a result of the threat posed by the Warsaw Pact.<sup>65,66</sup> This could restore the numerical military balance, but at the cost of a fatal loss in NATO's cohesion. Resurrecting historical fears regarding Germany's military potential would probably be encouraged by both extreme conservatives in Western Europe and by the Soviet Union as well as Germany's eastern border states.



## CONCLUSIONS

First, the political and economic consequences of a major reduction in United States military presence are more serious and disruptive than any near-term military effects.

Second, European requirements for United States military presence are likely to remain at their present or higher levels throughout the remainder of this decade. United States presence is required more to maintain political unity than to counter the direct military threat on the continent posed by the Warsaw Pact. This does not mean that the United States should discontinue its efforts to achieve mutual and balanced force reductions.

Third, détente and United States success in relaxing East-West tensions has created a euphoric view that neglects the fact that these successes are based on credible military parity. Research reflected in this study suggests that premature, unilateral United States force reductions would diminish the likelihood of obtaining any corresponding reduction by the Warsaw Pact. Viewed in this context, present United States military commitments toward NATO's implicitly stated goal of promoting solidarity appear unrealistic. This facet is reflected more in the less visible aspects of commitment than in actual troop presence. The extensive and widely publicized public debates on United States military presence undermine the credibility of that very presence. This does

not mean that United States forces should be increased nor that debate should be silenced. It does mean that additional evidence of commitment is required in the political and economic areas to maintain confidence in United States commitment to the Alliance's objectives and to assure continued deterrent credibility.

Fourth, European requirements for United States military presence are determined largely by United States-Soviet strategic stability--a factor deliberately isolated from this study. Any major shift in this balance will immediately and significantly impact requirements for United States presence in Europe.

*John Messer*

#### FOOTNOTES

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<sup>20</sup>"Strategic Survey, 1973," p. 62.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>"Europe Moves Toward Dangerous Fragmentation as Chancellor Resigns and Italy Challenges Free Trade," Business International, May 10, 1974, p. 145.

<sup>23</sup>Goodpaster, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup>T. R. Milton, GEN, USAF, "NATO and the Aging Process," Strategic Review, Winter 1974, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup>Delbert M. Fowler, "How Many Divisions? A NATO-Warsaw Pact Assessment," Military Review, November 1972, pp. 76-88.

<sup>26</sup>John Newhouse, Melvin Croan, Edward R. Fried and Timothy W. Stanley, "U.S. Troops in Europe: Issues, Costs and Choices," p. 53.

<sup>27</sup>"The Military Balance 1973-74," pp. 87-90.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>"Leading European Nations Defense Expenditures, 1969-73," Interavia, July 1974, p. 635.

<sup>31</sup>Goodpaster, p. 6.

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<sup>48</sup>"The Military Balance, 1973-74," p. 90.

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